



ISSANJI

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

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– SPRING 2000 –

Hartford Street Zen Center is a small Buddhist temple of the Soto Zen tradition situated in the heart of the Castro district. We offer a daily schedule of Zen Buddhist meditation, sitting instruction, Saturday Public lectures, and mid-day sittings for the HIV community and caregivers. HSZC was started in 1981 by a group of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners to serve everyone in the neighborhood. It is also called Issanji, One Mountain Temple, after our founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. The resident teacher is Zenshin Philip Whalen.

Beginner's Mind

by Jaku Kinst

Excerpts from her Dharma talk at HSZC on November 13, 1999.

What do we mean by beginner's mind? How do we cultivate it and thread our way back to it when we get lost? Suzuki Roshi said, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few." Beginner's mind has a quality of openness – this is a key to our practice. Beginner's mind has a kind of flexibility, the feeling that you can go in any direction and don't yet know who you are going to be. There is an enthusiasm and aliveness that comes from that feeling.

We hear about beginner's mind a lot in Zen. Sometimes we hear

it so often that we get encrusted with assumptions and need to take a fresh look to see what is inside. One important thing when cultivating beginner's mind is being honest with ourselves. Like when you first came to a Zen center and encountered people in black robes. Many of us got frightened. When we don't know how to act or what we're supposed to say, we have this fear of looking foolish. Most of us try to avoid these feelings and cultivate a comfortable life. Yet we have to pay attention to uncomfortable feelings if we're going to enter beginner's mind.

When we take up practice our lives turn topsy-turvy. What we hear about enlightenment and liberation sounds wonderful, but the actual experience is about working with uncomfortable feelings over and over – anxiety, desire for security, and clinging to who we think we are. We think these



香雪蘭
石仁寫國香圖

Hsueh-ch'uang P'u-ming - Orchids

ideas can become known and comfortable, even if painful; “I’ll practice for five or ten years and get to someplace where it’s okay.” That is not what happens.

Some years ago I came across a statement in a book called, *How to Practice Zazen* by Yamoto Roshi, which has stuck with me for years: “*To be honest is the most important quality in the practice of zazen. We must suffer absolutely. No exception is allowed in seeking one’s real nature.*” Here is this sweet little book for a beginner, then you get hit with “*We must suffer absolutely.*” It seems harsh, but it’s exactly what we need to do to cultivate beginner’s mind. It’s about cultivating a vigorous attention so that we can look unwaveringly at what is happening around us. We need to develop trust in who we really are so that when anxieties or tensions arise we look to see what it is. This honesty means being willing to take up the truth of the suffering of human life, to look at suffering long enough to understand the truth of what we are about. Often we think that opening to the mystery of who we are occurs only in zazen or some special activity – but the meat and potatoes of our practice is our day-to-day willingness to practice.

“*To be honest is the most important quality in the practice of zazen.*” But this willingness does not separate us from other people. When we take up a spiritual practice, sometimes we think we are different from people jogging or talking on their cell phones. That is the wrong direction. We need to drop down and be knitted into humanity, not into some special place. We need to be present for our lives as they are. All people struggle with this. We’re not alone. It is not some grim, painful, endless process. We are talking here about being present for our lives and engaging in the first noble truth – not avoiding suffering and not going out of our way to find it. Being absolutely present and willing. When we do this, we begin to use the teachings in a bodily integrated way. Then we notice all the ways we deceive ourselves. To practice “*no deception*” doesn’t mean clawing away all the flaws in order to come up with some pure essence underneath. That’s not the point. It’s the act of non-deceiving – a concrete simple way of looking at life. To be honest is the most important quality in the practice of zazen. We must suffer absolutely. No deception is allowed.

It’s kind of a trick. We think we understand what this means, then suddenly we are flipped over. But by creating an area of honesty, our center of gravity shifts.

By being absolutely present and looking at our self-deception, we center in a warmhearted precise awareness. Not in the feeling that “you’ll get it all packaged up” – “If I’m honest with myself, I’ll get to the bottom and then disappear.” That is the opposite direction of where we want to go. When we take up this practice in a mundane, ordinary and consistent way, then our lives become more flexible. Then we can really get in the vicinity of beginner’s mind. We have to be willing to be taught by the nature of our mind.

Building Repairs

by David Prowler

Mid-March, reconstruction work on the Zen Center’s foundation, zendo floor, and heating system began. The work should take about one month. We are repairing the squishy floor at the bottom of the zendo stairs, the drips in the walls and ceiling, which turn into torrents during heavy rain, the earthquake vulnerability of the structure, the inefficient furnace (which will be replaced by a smaller version allowing us to enlarge the zendo), and the trampoline-like floor boards. In December, we took care of the leaky roof that was the source of many of the building’s problems.

We are excited about the reconstruction project - it’s been a long time coming. In the last few years, probably a dozen contractors poked around under the zendo and left shaking their heads before we finally got the services of *Triangle Engineering* and *Great Wall Construction*. Both have done lots of work for the City’s non-profit housing development corporations and have great reputations.

The work is being financed by the generous responses to our fund-raising appeals, for which we are very grateful. And also through the refinancing of Hartford Street Zen Center’s mortgage. We were able to get favorable, long term financing through the tremendous effort of Mark Skolnick of *Investment Property Capital*. Mark came through after other mortgage brokers gave up, and we owe him our thanks.

The zendo has been relocated to the upstairs dining room during construction. But our practice schedule will continue unchanged. Please bear with these temporary hindrances as Hartford Street Zen Center is improved and made safe for current and future generations of sitters.

HSZC NEWS

Following the Annual Member's meeting on March 4th, we moved the zendo altar, cushions and mats upstairs to the dining room. Cleaning out the basement zendo we uncovered dust monsters, mildew covered objects behind the bamboo curtains from Maitri days, and another major plumbing leak on the back wall. So far, *Great Wall Construction* guys have ripped outhalf the stairway and the adjacent floor. Concrete is being laid over the dirt and they are replacing dry-rotted support beams in the wall. Also, the tree in the front yard was trimmed, letting in more light to Zenshin's room.

Meanwhile, the temporary dining room zendo is a fun place to sit. Often, Buckley the cat or Dexter the black hound dog wander in to join us during mid-morning sittings for the HIV group. Our meditative silence is accompanied by the sounds of hammering, electric saws, and Chinese radio pop music from the workers in the zendo below.

For some time now, Hartford Street has been seeking new spiritual leadership. Our Abbot, **Phillip Whalen**, stepped down as Abbot several years ago while retaining the position of resident teacher. In the interim, *SF Zen Center* has been very generous with help, and also teachers from throughout the Bay Area have lectured, taught courses, and guided us. But we sent out the call for new resident leadership last winter. Two teachers have responded – **Ottmar Engle** of Berlin and *Crestone Mountain Zen Center* and **Daiken Nelson** of the *Village Zendo in New York*. They both sound great. In the coming months, Ottmar and then Daiken will be spending time with us, getting to know Hartford Street and letting us get to know them. Ottmar will be with us for the month of May, Daiken in June. Please be sure to come by and meet them.

Community Thrift Store 625 Valencia Street at 17th, 415-861-4910. Please keep your donations of old clothes, furniture and books coming. Drop off donations at the side door on Sycamore Alley, and register them to HSZC, account #155.

Newsletter Production

Donations to help cover Newsletter production and mailing costs are always appreciated!

Editor: **Jennifer Birkett**, 415-647-0465, e-mail Pixel22@Earthlink.net.

Assistant editors: **Brit Pyland**, **George Gayuski**, **Zenshin**, and **David Prowler**.

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Formatting and mailing list: **Ron Wickliffe**, 415-643-7148, e-mail RWickliffe@aol.com. Please help us maintain our mailing list. Call or e-mail Ron with your new address when you move.

ZEN DISH

Your letters and articles are always welcome. Next newsletter deadline is June 1st. Write HSZC, Attn. Newsletter, or call Jennifer Birkett at 415-647-0465.

Carrots

by George Gayuski

Issan was working in the kitchen (don't remember if it was Page Street or Tassajara, but seem to recall the story was at Tassajara) and was weary of the vegetarian and dietary fanaticism going on at Zen Center at the time. (Issan loved to brag about eating hamburgers out on Saturday nights.) One student was about to start chopping a carrot and Issan hollered: "WAIT! Are you SURE that carrot is dead?"

That stone Buddha deserves
all the birdshit it gets

I wave my skinny arms like
a tall flower in the wind.
-Ikkyu



Maitri, In These Times

by Cecilia Tom

Maitri provides compassionate residential care to low-income men and women living with disabling AIDS. It was founded by Issan Dorsey in 1987. Call (415) 558-3000 for information on volunteering and donations.

the computers did not crash on Leap Day, though they did on all other days

the monitor blaring:

disjointed thoughts	irregular heartbeats
loading, still loading	breathing still
need office space	we have a home
live-work	live-die
DSL	DNR
8 cubicles	15 rooms
Chinese take-out	communal dining
and a beer	and 64 pills
five-star golf resort	residential hospice
shiatsu appointment	dialysis, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays
dot-coms	www.maitrisf.org
four-wheel drive	wheelchair accessible
stock options	living will
securities lawyer	DPOA for health care
the next IPO	on my next birthday . . . if it comes
invincibly young	HIV, and then AIDS
sync your Palm	truncated lifeline
the indispensable handheld	but who will hold your hand?
VCs	MDs, RNs, LVNs, CNAs
investors	donors
roadshow	AIDS Walk
martinis, happy hour	antiretroviral cocktails
conquering the fat gene, the sad gene	6'1", 94 pounds
virus scan	no vaccine
hacked!	immune shutdown
Sudden Wealth Syndrome	cancer, dementia, depression, sores
suddenly appearing needy relatives	compassionate friendship for people in need
Microsoft Office Assistant that won't go away	volunteers wanted
caffeine	morphine
\$23 godzillion public offering	\$10,000 foundation grant
employee stock purchase plan	tax-deductible charitable contribution
young and gay	young and gay
retirement at 35	dead at 32
remember your dreams?	in memory of Scott
dream-home, 30-year mortgage	Maitri
beautiful	oh, so beautiful
we work, we play	we serve, we mourn
immortal	and forever grateful
billion-dollar contract	multiyear pledge
spam	a request for help
untarnished health	share the wealth
please live, kindly	please give, please love

Peace and prosperity.

the Maitri Money girl

Projection. Make Things Happen

by Fu Schroeder

Excerpts from her Saturday talk at HSZC in October, 1999.

"When you sail out in a boat in the middle of an ocean where no man is in sight and view the four directions, the ocean looks circular and does not look any other way. But the ocean is not long or square, its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace, it is like a jewel. It only looks circular as far as you can say at that time. All things are like this." From Dogen, founder of our school.

Dogen's image of the ocean is a good one for me because coming to sit in front of other people is like sitting in front of the ocean or looking at the mountain or sky. It's unfathomable and indefinable; vast and big. I think it is always this way between us – almost too much to bear. And so we do something interesting in order to make things happen again. Another name for this in psychological jargon is projection. Projection is a big word because of all our movie-going experience. We sit there staring at a blank screen, then somebody turns on the projector, and then there is the show. It is like the zazen effect. We are staring at the blank screen and here comes the show. Where is the show coming from? Usually we experience our creative power coming in small snippets, so quick that we almost don't notice.

I went to see the movie *Phantom Menace* recently. This character, Darth Vader, has a tool called a dual-light saber with light on both sides. This is kind of how our minds are. We take this unfathomable whole and chop it into little pieces: I like it, I don't; I want it, I don't; this is mine, that's yours; Evil/good; light/dark. One major topic of Buddhism is about how the mind creates two things out of one whole.

Buddha was on to projection from the moment of his awakening because that is the way to stop suffering, stop projecting, and just see what is here. He stopped imputing his own version and practices onto the world. When we turn this gift for projection inward, we see that this is how we make a self. We imagine ourselves to be so and so, and when we turn this talent outward we think that we are two different things... My imagination about others and myself is creative. Often we attribute creation to a god or goddess, our parents, society that made us, or to our education – anything but us. But imagine for a minute that we are the creator; that what we mean by god is just what we know, where each thing that we touch with our eyes, hands, or ears comes to life by contact with us – moment by moment.

The problem with these projections is that they cloud us from seeing how beautiful creation is. Creation arises so magnificently in rainbows and in children. So what blocks us

so that we can't see the meaning of just what is here? One of the saddest things is that not everyone finds out what's going on in themselves. The Zen teachers that I have known and loved have found their way out of their imaginations – and in doing that they give helpful hints to other people. Still, each has a different route to take.

We all want to know how to do this. What is the how? How do you find your way through this dark place? There aren't any signs. Or if there are, they just point the wrong way. The word Zen comes from the Sanskrit word *jnana*, which means a meditative absorption that culminates in the cessation of all dualistic distinctions – self and other, inside and outside, is and isn't. When contemplative people engage in this practice over time, they begin to see that as more drops away and becomes quieter, then disturbed sound just comes and goes. And what are they looking for? Is there a substance or bedrock to this existence of a self that has an absolute, essential bottom – anything to get to, anything remaining? That was the question they were trying to solve. When all else drops away what is left of my self?

It's very helpful to study the old yogis and their claims. This is a voyage of inner discovery – looking for gold. Some theories were that Buddha would find god, the meaning of Brahman-light – and be done with it once and for all. There were other theories about cessation and nothing. My sense is that this is just more testimonial to an imaginary world of form. The Buddha's insight and teaching that followed his emergence from the state of cessation is that there is no ultimate subject, no incorruptible object, nor any other claim. He basically said that all phenomena are non-substantial. You cannot substantiate these claims. So what is left if you refute claims for a self and other? What we have left is basically all that is allowed by the Dharma.

From the Diamond Sutra: *"As the stars, as a fault of vision, as a lamp, a mock show, dewdrops or a bubble, a lightning flash or a clap."* If that makes you happy, then it is good.

The Buddha did not find that the culmination of the spiritual journey was an end to it all – death, cessation. Nor did he find that the culmination of the spiritual journey was eternal life. He didn't find either extreme. He found a middle way – how it all works. He wrote the how-to book – this is how the world works. Buddha studied his ordinary self in order to come to this realization. He studied the deep belief in a separate, independent, isolated self. Even though sex, drugs and trance can exempt us from experiencing our self as isolated, it will come back the next morning. There you are again. This person keeps coming back. Finally, one morning, Buddha looked up at the sky at an ordinary star and saw just this person-no pretensions. The clouds were gone, just this star. And then he wiggled his toes, looked at flowers, and tried to help people to appreciate just this. He had still a sense of a separate self, but knew that it was a story.

HSZC Temple Schedule

HSZC offers a traditional schedule of Zen meditation. Beginner's instruction is held every Saturday morning in the zendo from 8:30 to 9:00am. There is a public lecture every Saturday at 10:00am, followed by discussion and tea. All are welcome. Please arrive 10 minutes prior to scheduled times. Absolute beginners are also welcome to attend the Saturday morning Zen Workshops for Beginners, held every six weeks.

When construction on the zendo is complete, probably mid-April, the current weekday morning zazen schedule will be replaced with two 40-minute periods starting at 5:00am.

MORNING: Monday through Friday

5:45am Zazen
6:15am Interval
6:20am Zazen
6:45am Service

EVENING: Monday through Friday

6:00pm Zazen
6:40pm Service

SATURDAY: Beginning Zazen instruction at 8:30am.

9:10am Zazen

10:00am Public Lecture, followed by tea and discussion. Donations to support the temple are appreciated.

Monthly Memorial Service for Temple founder Issan Dorsey Roshi is held on the 6th day of each month.

Membership Practicing members sit regularly, attend practice interviews, and contribute a suggested \$40 monthly. Supporting members contribute \$20 or more a year and receive newsletters by mail. If you can pledge even \$10 a month, this helps the fiscal health of our temple significantly. You are welcome as a member of our Sangha, and we offer you whatever support you may need in your practice.

Groups Meeting at HSZC

HIV Sitting Group For those with HIV, caregivers, lovers, and friends. Meets Thursday and Friday at 10:30 am. Sitting until 11:00 am. Meditation instruction offered. Contact: (415) 863-2507.

Schedule of Upcoming Talks and Events

Some TBAs below will be filled in by visiting teachers-Daiken and Ottmar-or by Zenshin. For further information, and for last minute updates and program changes, please see the Hartford Street Zen Center events and calendar webpage at: <http://www.wenet.net/~lobsang/hszcevents.htm> or call 415.863.2547.

Saturday, April 8th, 10am	Zenshin
Saturday, April 15th, 10am	Okamaru-sensei.
Saturday, April 22nd, 10am	TBA
Saturday, April 29th, 10am	David Haselwood
Saturday, May 6th, 10am	Mark Lancaster
Saturday, May 13th, 10am	Ottmar Engel, Guest
	Practice leader. from Crestone, Co.
Saturday, May 20th, 10am	Ottmar Engel
Saturday, May 27th, 10am	Ottmar Engel
Saturday, June 3rd, 10am	Zenshin
Saturday, June 10th, 10am	TBA
Saturday, June 17th, 10am	TBA
Saturday, June 24th, 10am	TBA
Saturday, July 1st, 10am	TBA

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